

**MINUTES OF A MEETING HELD IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE IN
HISTORIC ROOM 13 AT 5.00 PM ON THURSDAY 30 April 2026
THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY MEDIA ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

D/DSMA/3/2/1

The following were present:

Mr Paul Wyatt (Chairman)
Mr Gareth Martin (MOD)
Ms Liz Wright (Home Office)
Mr Adam Trigg (FCDO)

Mr John Battle (Vice-Chairman)
Mr Ian Brunskill
Mr Jack Lefley
Ms Sayra Tekin
Ms Sarah Whitehead
Ms Eilidh Wilson
Mr John McLellan
Ms Lisa Mitchell
Mr Paul Kunert
Ms Joy Yates
Mr Ben Lowry
Mr James Green
Ms Caroline Cummins

Secretariat

Brigadier (Retired) Geoffrey
Dodds Secretary
Captain Jon Perkins RN (Retired)

Apologies had been received from:

Mr Matthew Collins, Mr Robert Winnett, Mr Andrew Dagnall, Mr David Dillon, Mr Joe Fay, Ms Dawn Alford, Mr David Higgerson, Mr David Jordan and Lieutenant Commander Stephen Dudley RN (Retired)

Agenda Item 1 – Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 29 April 2025

1. The minutes of the Autumn Meeting were accepted as a true record of discussion.

Agenda Item 2 – Matters arising from Previous Meeting

2. The Impact of the Crime and Policing Bill – presumption of Anonymity for Police Firearms Officers. At the last meeting, the media-side highlighted concern over the Bill, specifically the proposal to introduce a presumption of anonymity for Police Firearms officers. Although not strictly DSMA business, the Acting Chair had previously agreed the forum was appropriate and it was an issue that should be addressed. He had asked the Home Office member to investigate and report back to the Committee at this meeting.

3. Ms Liz Wright (Home Office) introduced the discussion by explaining the purpose of the Act and the policy intention of the clause in question. The intention is to establish a presumption of anonymity for firearms officers charged with an offence following a police shooting, starting from the initial court process. This aims to protect officers who are at heightened risk of retribution due their unique role, by ensuring their details are not published prior to the first hearing in a magistrates' court, where an application for an anonymity order would be considered. The intention is not to provide broader protections than those available under the court's jurisdiction and the court retains the ability to refuse the order.

4. Ms Wright then noted and welcomed the engagement between Home Office officials, ministers and media bodies (specifically the NMA), since the last meeting.

5. Ms Tekin (NMA General Counsel) provided an update based on that engagement. Ms Tekin was most helpful in explaining that concerns with the anonymity aspects of the legislation were twofold: First, a presumption of anonymity runs contrary to the basic principle of open justice, creating unintended consequences that undermine established law in this area. Misconduct by public servants in the course of their public duties is subject to the highest levels of transparency pursuant to open justice. This law reverses that fundamental principle and could create issues going forward. Second, is a policy issue and a lack of evidence for taking such a fundamental step. Concerningly, the reason for the grave piece of legislation was to encourage recruitment and retention of Firearms officers. Ms Tekin highlighted that (i) no evidence to link the purported policy concern and the legislative measure was put forward, despite repeated requests, but that the Minister relied on unspecified anecdotal evidence; and (ii) no evidence or reasoning was put forward to show how and why the current regime is not working. Ms Tekin expressed concerns that, given Royal Assent, it may take another major scandal, such as the shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes, for the gravity of this ill-conceived measure to be put right in the future.

7. The Bill has now received Royal assent.

Agenda Item 3 - Secretary's Report 27 Oct 25 - 17 Apr 26

8. The Secretary presented his six-monthly report. He pointed out that there had only been a slight reduction in requests for advice (52),

against the previous period (59), but still below the 10-year historical average (65). Perhaps more interestingly the 'quality' of requests had declined, ie there were less requests for advice on truly substantive issues. For example, in this period, there was a significant reduction in the number of requests relating to UK Special Forces yet a substantial increase in the number of RFAs relating to the operation of the notice system. The Media side expressed a collective surprise that more requests for advice had not been received.

9. No Supplementary Notices had been issued during this period.

10. The Secretary offered 2 examples of how the system had worked well:

a. Venezuela and RAF Fairford. A defence editor requested advice on a draft article in which he intended to report that:

i. UKSF operating in Central America had been involved in the US Maduro kidnap operation.

ii. Significant US Special Forces support aircraft had been seen landing at RAF Fairford.

The secretariat advised the defence editor on both matters. There was no DSMA concern over the large build-up of US air assets at RAF Fairford but advised against speculation that any UKSF deployments in the region (DSMA 03) might have included support to US Special Forces in Venezuela.

b. Strava Running Routes. A number of armed forces personnel based in highly sensitive locations (Faslane, Akrotiri, Wyton, Northwood, Menwith Hill and others) had uploaded personal running data onto the publicly available *STRAVA* app. This enabled an adversary to access their and their family members' SPI and linked social media accounts, thus exposing them to blackmail and coercion. A journalist had discovered this and intended to publish all the details less the SPI. He requested DSMA advice and was counselled that any information which could reveal physical or electronic access to these sites should not be published (DSMA 04).

11. On a less positive note the Secretary went on to discuss a complaint made with reference to the system in operation and a procedural briefing given to a third party. The Chair noted that he and the

Vice Chair had discussed the issue, taken appropriate action and responded to the complainant.

12. Briefing and Outreach: The Secretary then highlighted 3 unusual and high-profile promotional events namely: an appearance made on the Radio 4 'Media Show, advice to a TV drama production company and an in person briefing to a foreign media and government audience in Latvia.

Agenda Item 4 - Cyber and Counter-Terrorism Policing Update

13. The Secretary reported against the standing remit to inform the Committee on these two topics.

14. There were no RFAs on cyber matters and two events only loosely connected to counter-terrorism.

a. Drama Production. The Producer had approached the Secretary requesting a brief on the DSMA Notice system, how it works and how it might be incorporated into a television drama series. Subsequently, pre-production publicity indicates that the advice provided may, in part, form the basis of a multi episode drama production for the BBC.

b. Salisbury Poisonings 2018 (4). The Home Office requested advice on behalf of another Department of State (DoS) in connection with the production of a documentary about the 2018 Salisbury Poisonings. Although the production company had invited all relevant DoSs to contribute to the production some 15 months ago, this one did not wish to do so. As the final edits to the documentary were being made, the DoS aired concerns the producers were going to broadcast highly sensitive footage of classified decontamination techniques. But the DoS felt unable to brief DSMA on its concerns (too sensitive). The secretariat was therefore unable to offer advice to the production company. It later transpired that the footage had been taken by Armed Forces personnel at the time of the event and had been available on the internet for more than 8 years so was classed as Widely Available in the Public Domain (WAPD). The Secretary later briefed desk officers at the DoS to ensure it can employ the DSMA system effectively in future.

Post meeting note: The documentary has since been broadcast by Channel 4 and is currently available to stream.

Agenda Item 5 - Operational Update

15. The Chairman provided the Committee with a most interesting Operational update. In doing so he noted that this had been one of the busiest periods on record. Expanding, he highlighted in outline some of the key events of the last 6 months and then spent a little more time on US operations in the Persian Gulf.

16. While easy to become distracted by current events in the Gulf region the Chair highlighted the ongoing importance of Ukraine to UK policy. He also noted the success of last year's Naval Carrier Strike Group deployment to the Indo Pacific, a first for many years and something that provided a genuine demonstration of capability.

17. The briefing and question and answer session was as open as possible given the classifications involved. It was very well received by the audience who thought this to be an important part of the DSMA committee agenda.

Agenda Item 6 - Any other Business

18. Four items were raised:

- a. The Committee agreed a short **summary** of the Secretary's report for the period to be placed on the DSMA website.
- b. **DSMA Reception** 1 July 2026. The Chair highlighted that the annual reception would take place on 1 July 2026. He noted that both Deputy Secretaries may be absent and therefore asked members to attend where possible also bringing one junior member of their staff. If members would like to invite other guests then they should inform the Secretary no later than 25 May 26.
- c. Move to online. A brief discussion indicated some interest in conducting some future meetings online when the agenda allowed. However, it was pointed out that this would preclude any operational updates such as that just received. It may be sensible to meet online at some point in the future but there is no intent to introduce this as a matter of routine.
- d. Potential visits to sites of interest/relevance were discussed. The Secretary undertook to investigate further a possible trip to the HMG facility at Samlesbury in Lancashire.

Action: Secretary

Agenda item 7 - Date of the Next Meeting

19. The next meeting will be held on Thursday 12 November in MoD Main Building. The meeting will be followed by the DSMA Annual Dinner at the RAF club on Picadilly.

20. The meeting closed at 1845 when members adjourned to the Henry VIII cellars for an informal gathering and historical brief.

Geoffrey Dodds

Geoffrey Dodds
Brigadier (Retired), Secretary
Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee

28 May 2026

Distribution:

All DSMA Committee Members
The DSMA website